A DISCOURSE

SHEWING THE

BENEFICIAL EFFECTS

OF THE

Eſtabliſhed Religious Worſhip

OF

ENGLAND.

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MVSEVM
BRITAN
NICVM

A

DISCOURSE, &c.

DEUT. IV. v. 2.

THOU ART AN HOLY PEOPLE UNTO THE LORD; AND HE HATH CHOSEN THEE TO BE A PECULIAR PEOPLE UNTO HIMSELF.

THESE words were originally addreſſed to the Jews; and they may for a ſimilar reaſon be addreſſed with equal and even greater propriety to the profeſſors of the Goſpel. But, it is *our* more immediate concern to enquire whether they may be as juſtly applied to the members of the eſtabliſhed Church; that we may have the comfort of knowing that

we are a holy nation unto God, and choſen to be a peculiar people unto himſelf: that we may be grateful to God for his benefits, and careful to merit his favours.

But to eſtabliſh the truth of the fact, we muſt conſider what would be our probable condition, if we lived totally deſtitute of the means of improvement; and make a fair repreſentation of that wiſdom, comfort, and happineſs, which is now derived by us from our religious inſtitution. Now, it appears, from the ſlighteſt reflection upon human nature, that we are ſent into the world in the uttermoſt ignorance of our duty and happineſs; and with a moſt willing inclination to indulge our humours and paſſions, though they lead us to certain deſtruction.

Nature has implanted in the human race certain paſſions and appetites as capacities of enjoyment, and points out to them

them the means of gratification. Hence, the paſſions urge us on to a moſt ſanguine purſuit of thoſe objects, which furniſh moſt of the pleaſures for which life is deſirable. But, there is a point where theſe enjoyments end; where they ceaſe to conſiſt with our own permanent happineſs, and the lawful enjoyments of others: and Nature has given us no intuitive knowledge of this point. This knowledge muſt proceed from long obſervation and experience. But I am afraid that moſt men would find experience come too ſlow for the uſe of their lives; that the concluſions of mere experience would be too variable and uncertain; and that ill habits would eſtabliſh ſuch an abſolute dominion, as would unavoidably ſway their actions for the reſt of their lives. Here then is a manifeſt proof of our natural ignorance. While men's paſſions are eager and impatient in the purſuit of enjoyment, it is impoſſible for them to ſee by nature, that death, or a violent fever, will

will be the effect of their pleaſures: that they will entail on themſelves and their families years of poverty, contempt, and ſorrow, for moments of enjoyment. Even the preſent lights of reaſon, religion, and philoſophy, with the ſtrong motives of the Goſpel, are not always ſufficient to guide or reſtrain us. Let no man ſuppoſe then that we have ſtrength from nature to govern our paſſions.

There is another point where the purſuit of enjoyment may interfere with the rights of our neighbours. Here, perhaps, a little reflection may ſhew us that it does ſo: But will Nature direct us to prefer the pleaſures and intereſts of others to our own? The Hiſtory of Savages give us no reaſon to ſuppoſe it: and I am afraid that the annals of civilized nations will afford us as little encouragement to think ſo. To reſtrain a man within ſuch limits, when he is engaged in ſuch an eager purſuit of his own ſatisfactions,

there

there muſt be ſuch knowledge of its remote conſequences as Nature never gave by mere intuition.

The collected experience of ages muſt inform him, that the general prevalence of ſelf-intereſt will deprive him of all the pleaſures and comforts of harmony, peace, and friendſhip, and of all the good offices and ſympathies of ſocial life, and even of the gratifications of wealth and the means of ſubſiſtence, and fill this miſerable world with envy, rancour, and malice, treachery and revenge.

The conviction that it is every man's intereſt to purſue no enjoyment that interferes with the rights of his neighbour, is ſo extremely remote from his preſent apprehenſions, that Nature leaves him entirely deſtitute of it in his original ſtate. We muſt conclude then, that men require ſpeedy information in this neceſſary point.

And

And, there is another point of knowledge, of the greateſt importance, of which we are naturally deſtitute; namely, that it is the will and pleaſure of our Heavenly Father that we ſhould obſerve the rules of temperance, moderation, and juſtice, as obligations to himſelf, although their ultimate end be our own ſatisfaction and comfort; that he will puniſh the violation of them with everlaſting miſery in a future ſtate; and reward the obſervance of them with everlaſting happineſs in his heavenly kingdom; and that we have received our lives, and every bleſſing we enjoy, not from chance, or the mere operation of natural cauſes, but from the kind hands of a gracious Creator. Theſe are truths which muſt naturally inſpire us with the powerful ſentiments of hope, fear, and gratitude, to ſway our inclinations; but they are truths which we could not have known from the light of Nature, but from Divine Revelation: For we learn

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REASON itſelf will inform us tha the comfort of mankind in this world, as well as their happineſs in the next, depends upon love, fear, and gratitude towards God; upon temperance and moderation in our own enjoyments; and upon juſtice and humanity towards one another; and that they ſhould therefore be promoted, as much as poſſible, by the public forms of religion.

The preſent diſcourſe is an attempt to ſhew that our own eſtabliſhed worſhip has a manifeſt tendency to promote theſe virtues in the nation; that we may be induced, from a due ſenſe of the common intereſts of humanity, to give all poſſible effect to the aims of ſuch an excellent inſtitution. It does not mean to derogate from the merit of many diſſenters in this reſpect; however he may ſuſpect that their public prayers muſt depend too much, perhaps, upon the judgment and abilities of the miniſter; but

ſimply to ſhew the national advantages of the eſtabliſhed worſhip.

The author once intended to add a few diſcourſes more, upon the particular aims and effects of the ſeveral public offices of the church; but he has now entirely declined the thoughts of it, from the perſuaſion that a few ſhort hints will lead the mind into ſuch trains of reflection, as may be attended with more real improvement than can be expected from more voluminous publications. However, if health and leiſure will permit, he intends to offer, to the attention of the public, a ſhort treatiſe on the Holy Sacraments, with a view to ſhew, that they may be great inſtruments of virtue and happineſs to us, if we take any pains to promote their deſign; and to induce us to pay a more ſerious regard to theſe neceſſary inſtitutions of Chriſt, than it is the happineſs of the preſent generation to do. He is ſorry to obſerve, that the writings of the learned Dr. Bell, with many others, muſt be charged, in ſome meaſure, with this fatal indifference.

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from the hiſtory of mankind, that nature, without Divine Revelation, or perhaps ſuch an improvement of reaſon as few of the human race can expect, ſuggeſts only to the feeble and imperfect capacity of man, the exiſtence of capricious and arbitrary powers, which act alone from their own wayward inclinations and humours, without any regard to the welfare of mankind. Thus we are manifeſtly ſent into the world, wholly unacquainted with our duty and happineſs; and deſtitute of thoſe religious motives, which ſhould incline us to purſue the real and permanent good of our own nature! So that Nature without ſome eſtabliſhed mode of improvement, would leave us in a moſt deſperate caſe; when, at the ſame time, we have a violent diſinclination to purſue the paths of our happineſs; even, after ſome friendly inſtructor has made us acquainted with them; after we have diſcovered them from our own experience, and the deductions of reaſon,

from the inſtruction of others, or from Divine Revelation. The paſſions urge us on to a moſt eager purſuit of preſent enjoyment: ſo that whatever paſſion is uppermoſt, a man is apt to eſteem the indulgence of it at the time, as his chief felicity; he purſues the deluſive phantom without moderation or reaſon; he devours it with a moſt fierce inconſiderate appetite.

If any impediment obſtructs his purſuit, the imagination comes forth, and gilds the deſired object with a thouſand charms, which Nature never deſigned it. And, beſides, the commerce of the world increaſes the deluſion; the paſſions gain additional ſtrength from the example of others: men tempt one another by various allurements, and deceive themſelves by falſe reaſonings to the fatal purſuit of pernicious enjoyments. Thus the ſtrength of the underſtanding, and the whole force of deſire, are bent upon the attainment

of

of preſent good: and hence our natural inclination to evil.

For, the mind, in this ſituation, is wholly occupied with its preſent delight. The underſtanding perceives it in its full extent; the imagination enlarges it with falſe perſpective, and gilds it with imaginary charms. And hence the feeble eye of reaſon has only a faint glimmering of all enjoyments beyond the preſent. The remote advantages of preſent ſelf-denial ariſe from future health, future joy, and future proſperity, and perhaps from the wealth, ſafety, and happineſs of neighbours, and are ſpread over the whole of life: ſo many ſcattered rays are not eaſily collected into a point: nor are ſuch diſtant objects eaſily attracted to ſufficient proximity for a fair compariſon with the preſent deſires and purſuits of the heart. Future good has therefore ſmall attraction. Nature has furniſhed it with no preſent advocate to plead its

cauſe, nor witneſs to teſtify of its merit. Hence our paſſions naturally incline us to the eager purſuit of preſent enjoyment, and to the fatal neglect of our future happineſs. Nor is this the peculiar fate of ignorant ſavages in a barbarous ſtate, or of youth alone before experience has furniſhed them with wiſdom; but an unhappy failing that purſues the human race through every ſtage of improvement: for the faint view of future benefit makes leſs impreſſion upon our minds, than the pleaſures and intereſts of the preſent.

Thus every man has a law in his members, warring againſt the law in his mind: and thus man is naturally placed in a wretched ſituation, by the ſtrength of his paſſions, and the weakneſs of his reaſon. But God has graciouſly provided a relief for us againſt this unhappy infirmity; which is a previous knowledge of the melancholy effects of immoderate

immoderate indulgences; and the motives of hope, fear, and gratitude, to counterballance the force of the paſſions.

For our public worſhip makes us well acquainted with our duties to ourſelves and others: It declares that we ſhould beware of fleſhly luſts, which war againſt the ſoul; that we ſhould make no proviſion for the fleſh to fulfil the luſts thereof; but that we ſhould keep our bodies in temperance, ſoberneſs, and chaſtity.

It enjoins alſo that we ſhould do unto others, as we would have others do unto us; that we ſhould be true and juſt in our dealings; that we ſhould render unto all their due, and make all poſſible ſatisfaction for what injuries we may have done our brethren, and provide things honeſt in the ſight of all men. It enjoins alſo that we ſhould put on the bowels of mercy, forgiveneſs, and kindneſs; that we ſhould be merciful, as our

Father,

Father, which is in Heaven, is merciful; that we ſhould be kindly affectioned one to another; that we rejoice with thoſe that rejoice, and weep with thoſe that weep.

And thus our public worſhip makes us well acquainted with our moral duties, and inſtructs us how to live a peaceable, a quiet, and a happy life.

But as this knowledge alone cannot reſtrain our paſſions, we are alſo made acquainted with our natural weakneſs, that we may be cautious to avoid its effects. Our religion informs us that the heart of man is continually bent upon evil; that we are conſtantly expoſed to the malicious arts and temptations of the enemy; and that we cannot ſtand upright through the infirmity of our nature; and we therefore humbly beſeech him to aſſiſt us with the healthful ſpirit of his grace, to withſtand the temptations of the world, the fleſh, and the Devil.

And,

And, laſtly, to ſtrengthen our virtue againſt the various temptations of life, we are taught that there is a great and mighty God, who is the King of Kings, and the Lord of Lords, whoſe power no creature is able to reſiſt; and that he will judge the world in righteouſneſs, and make manifeſt the ſecrets of the heart; that all men ſhall riſe from their graves to give an account of their actions, and that they that have done good ſhall go into everlaſting happineſs, and they that have done evil, into everlaſting miſery. We are, therefore, adviſed to lay a good foundation againſt the world to come, that we may be heirs of his heavenly kingdom.

And, ſurely, the powerful ſentiments of hope, fear, and gratitude, thus inſtilled into our breaſts by our national worſhip, muſt greatly ſtrengthen our virtue againſt the dominion of the paſſions.

Now,

Now, after having laid before you the natural wants and infirmities of man, and the means which the providence of God has furniſhed for our relief, it will be proper to take a general view of their real effects. And, firſt, it is manifeſt that the accurate knowledge of prudence, temperance, and chaſtity; juſtice, humanity, and charity, muſt be attended with ſome beneficial effects; it will inform *us* what line of conduct we ought to purſue, with reſpect to ourſelves and others; ſo that we can never be ignorant whether our actions be injurious to our own permanent happineſs, or the intereſts of others; and it will inform *our neighbours* what kind of treatment they have a right to expect from us, ſo that the reſt of the world ſhall never heſitate a moment how to think of our actions, and treat our behaviour.

And this muſt be no inconſiderable advantage to morality and virtue; for no man

man can expect the favour, and friendſhip and eſteem of mankind, nor any reputation in the world, if he preſumes to gratify his own inclinations at the expence of his neighbour, or to ſhock the common apprehenſions of mankind by vicious and indecent behaviour.

Thus a ſtrong ſenſe of our reputation, honour, and intereſt in the world, is derived from this accurate knowledge of our duties, to reſtrain our paſſions, and to induce us to prefer the views of permanent happineſs to all the attractions of preſent enjoyment.

There is no doubt but that the generality of men would act from the preſent impulſe of their paſſions, to their own inevitable deſtruction, were it not for this religious inſtruction; for, even, with all the powerful helps of public worſhip, and public inſtruction, which our Heavenly Father has graciouſly afforded us,

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we are too apt to prefer the fleeting enjoyments of the preſent to future permanent happineſs. Secondly, it is certain that the ſenſe of our natural infirmity muſt make us extremely watchful over our conduct, leſt we fall into ſin and miſery, through the various temptations and allurements of the world. And, there is no doubt, but that this conſtant vigilance and care of our actions will prevent us from falling into many follies and vices, which would otherwiſe be the neceſſary reſult of our weakneſs; and from many atrocious acts of wickedneſs, which would inevitably terminate in our ſhame and ruin.

And, when we feel ſo ſenſibly the natural infirmities and frailties of our condition, we muſt gradually acquire ſome humility, candour, and pity for the failings of other men; and be diveſted of all that pride and ſelf-conceit, which fills this wretched world with the greateſt part

of

of its miſery. And laſtly, it muſt be confeſſed, that the belief of God's power, juſtice, and goodneſs, continually impreſſed upon our minds by our public worſhip, and of his intention to puniſh our iniquities, and to reward our virtues, in a future ſtate, will make us extremely careful not to offend him, from the powerful motives of hope and fear; and diſpoſe us to repent of every ſin we commit, and reſolve upon future amendment, that we may recover his favour.

In ſhort, our eſtabliſhed form of worſhip manifeſtly tends to promote juſtice, candour, humanity and charity, courteſy and civility, amongſt mankind; and to baniſh from the world all jealouſy, envy, hatred, and malice; all cruelty, oppreſſion, and injuſtice; all riot, intemperance, and debauchery; and all idleneſs, waſte, and extravagance: and thus it promotes our comfort and happineſs, and alleviates our affliction and miſery.

And though the preſent imperfection of humanity will not admit of a compleat effect, yet, any man who is qualified to make any compariſon between the happineſs and characters of the various nations of the earth, and between the effects of the various inſtitutions of the world, will not heſitate to declare that the prevailing character of this nation for temperance, juſtice, and humanity, which comprize all the virtues, will juſtly entitle us to the addreſs in the text, "Thou art an holy people unto the Lord;" and that we are chiefly indebted for this happineſs to our public worſhip, whoſe effects are as uniform, regular, and conſtant, as the light of the day, or the returns of the ſeaſons, though they can hardly be traced by the bulk of mankind, who are carried along by the ſtream of things; though it be not very difficult for them to perceive, that our public inſtructions muſt make us a more humane and benevolent people than the American ſavages, who

are

are taught, from infancy, to thirſt for blood; and a more juſt and honeſt race than the roving Arabs, whoſe trade is plunder. They might eaſily aſk themſelves the cauſe of this difference? And they might as eaſily anſwer, "That our public worſhip conſtantly recommends humanity, juſtice, and temperance to us; and endeavours to inſpire our hearts with kind inclinations; tells us that we came originally from the hands of the ſame Creator, and were made of the ſame materials; that we paſs through the ſame events, the ſame temptations, and the ſame dangers of life, to the ſame everlaſting habitation of happineſs or miſery; and that we ſtand in continual need of each other's aſſiſtance, that it is *in the power* of all mankind to aſſiſt one another; of the pooreſt, the meaneſt, and the loweſt, as well as of the richeſt, the higheſt, and the greateſt; and that theſe happy means of improvement are the cauſe of the difference."

Such,

Such, therefore, are the advantages of our eſtabliſhed worſhip, that we ought, all of us as *men*, as maſters of families, and as members of ſociety, to be truely thankful to our Heavenly Father, who has graciouſly beſtowed this ineſtimable bleſſing upon us; a bleſſing that will preſerve us from all the allurements and temptations of the world, to ſhameful or deſtructive exceſſes; and from all ſuch atrocious crimes and villainies as may prove fatal to our perſonal ſecurity and happineſs, or deſtroy our reputation and comfort in the world; preſerve our families from thoſe dangerous ſnares which abound in life, and ſeduce unexperienced youth from the ways of virtue and happineſs to the paths of deſtruction and miſery; render domeſtics faithful to the intereſts of their maſters, and diligent in their ſeveral employments; and diſpoſe thoſe maſters to treat them in return with juſtice and humanity; make all men truely benevolent and charitable, fair and

obliging

obliging to one another; baniſh all fraud, oppreſſion, and injury, all envy, hatred, and malice, and all injuſtice and cruelty out of the world; promote the enjoyments and comforts of life, alleviate its afflictions and miſeries, and ſecure for us everlaſting happineſs in the world to come. Now to God, &c.—Amen.

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